

SUMMARY OF THE 2005-06 ACHIEVEMENT GAP ON-SITE VISITS

SELECTION PROCESS

The Achievement Gap Team reviewed school progress data of Kentucky schools at the elementary, middle and high school levels to identify schools whose data demonstrated a closing of achievement gaps in one or more of the subpopulations listed in SB 168 (i.e., gender, students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, African American, students with low socio-economic status). The team used the same criteria established for the 2004-05 study to identify schools successfully closing achievement gaps. The criteria included:

- sustained evidence indicating whole school improvement for a minimum of six years (increase in academic index)
- made adequate yearly progress and not in school improvement
- closed the achievement gap in one or more subpopulations in reading and/or mathematics by at least 10 points;
- met or exceeded state accountability indices (81.5 for elementary, 75.8 for middle, 74.9 for high); and
- closed the gap in 60% of the content areas for the identified subpopulation.

Based on these criteria thirty-seven schools were selected for on-site visits to chronicle qualitative data (see attached 2005-06 recommendations). One principal declined an on-site visit. Two schools had a special education visit last spring and the extensive report was provided to the Achievement Gap Team.

Using the MSA goals (see attached Achievement Gap Site Visit Checklist), reviewers were asked to document a school's processes/practices, programs, people, policies, and the physical environment that assisted schools in successfully closing achievement gaps. Thirty-four site visits were conducted during a four-week timeframe and included: interviews with the principals, central office staff, teachers, students, and school leadership team members; review of CSIPs, SBDM policies, KPR reports, local assessment data; and a walk-through of the school facility. Each team completed the checklist and submitted summary reports to the Achievement Gap Team leaders. The reports were analyzed to determine individual practices, policies, and strategies contributing to a school's success in closing the achievement gap as well as identifying commonalities across all of the schools selected for this process.

FINDINGS

The common findings of the 2005-06 visits were similar to those from the 2004-05 visits. One common theme for schools observed by reviewers and evidenced in multiple ways by the schools themselves was the presence of a positive school culture and climate. However, in many schools there was not an intentional, open discussion about issues of race and achievement.

- Leadership, staff, students, and community stated they liked, valued, and enjoyed being a part of their school.
- Schools cited vision, mission, values, and goals centered on student achievement through improved curriculum and effective instruction, high expectations, accountability, and an “ALL means ALL” mentality.
- There was a collective purpose to ensure that each and every student would be successful.
- Teachers openly talked about ownership of their student’s learning.
- Also evidenced in each of the schools was strong leadership.
- The leadership in each of the schools went beyond the traditional principal as manager but showed the principal as a leader in curriculum, assessment and instruction.

In an effort to improve academic performance of learning, schools identified several processes to enhance effectiveness.

- Schools cited vertical and horizontal planning as commonplace and routine. To achieve this some had to reorganize planning periods.
- Reviewers observed high levels of collaboration, shared leadership, and collegiality.
- Schools consistently cited on-going assessment and multiple assessments as essential to effective planning and instruction of content.
- Many schools “mined” their data down to the individual student while others analyzed data within subgroups.
- Some schools intentionally focused on gaps while others focused on individual student achievement.
- Teachers and leadership understood the necessity of knowing exactly where the student is functioning from day to day in order to effectively plan future instruction and support for the individual student.
- All of the schools had strong emphasis of Core Content and Program of Studies with an increased focus on reading and math.

There was no one particular model that all of the schools used however, all had an intentional focus on the two content areas. There was district and school planning around reading and math with the purchase of some specific models (i.e. Thoughtful Education, Successful Schools Network, etc.). Intensive data analysis has helped drive many of the schools in the direction of one model or another. The majority of the schools have incorporated the use of technology as a part of everyday instruction and learning. Some were using Smart Boards for instructional purposes. Others expected students to create PowerPoint to illustrate and evidence learning.

Reviewers observed positive, respectful, mutual relationships among leadership, staff, students, parents, and community.

- Schools and stakeholders publicly celebrated and supported student effort and achievement. This was evidenced throughout the school through display of student work, community and district support through resources and general conversations with staff and stakeholders.

- The physical environment was safe, organized, and clean.
- Schools noted and reviewers observed a high rate of parent participation and volunteerism. The school also, when appropriate, provided additional support and resources to the family of a student.
- Schools noted that students with disabilities were not viewed as separate but a part of the general population. Resource rooms were used minimally with a strong emphasis on inclusion and collaboration to ensure access to general curriculum and rigor.
- Teachers accepted responsibility for all students. If a child was not reaching mastery, regardless of special education placement, a collective focus and process was in place to meet the child's needs by staff.
- Leadership at the district and school levels discussed the design of professional development that was based on the needs of the individual school as identified through the CSIP.
- Professional development was a process that was intentional, on going and systemic with a correlation to student achievement. Some teachers reported there was a freedom and expectation by leadership to seek professional development for professional growth.

Leadership was observed throughout the school. Teachers were encouraged and expected to assume leadership roles for increased and sustained schoolwide improvement and student achievement. Collective analysis of data and decision-making among staff and stakeholders was frequent and on going. Across all of the schools, districts and schools made sure that resources were provided based on the needs of the students. The district provided teachers with the resources they needed to meet their students' needs. In addition, the district leadership was visible in the school and a valuable resource to the staff. Beyond monetary resources, leadership ensured time and other resources were available to staff.